

Education of migrant children in India:

Impasse....

Opportunity.....

Or a path towards change...

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INTRODUCTION

The education-deprivation paradigm is at the heart of debates and polemics in India today.

India has more than 350 million children (the largest child population in the world), but it also has one of the largest “out-of-school children” population: today, more than 13 million children do not have access to the basic right to education and more than 45 million children are still considered as illiterate in India.

If this phenomenon has largely been attributed to a general (?) lack of will and consistency of the Indian government in the definition of education policies since Independence, in the past decade, efforts and moves towards the universalisation of education have been seen, particularly through the “Education for All” or Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, providing alternative and innovative education opportunities through the support and involvement of Non-Governmental Organizations to address this issue.

The new Right to Education Act signed in 2009 making “education free and compulsory for all children”, opens a new page in the history of education in India, but along with this, has reopened a debate, bringing on the one hand a new hope for positive change, and questioning on the other hand the reality of the involvement and responsibilities taken by the government at the grassroots level.

The coherence between the Act and the reality of millions of children who live in extremely risky condition, the pertinence of the approach, the measures and rules defined to reach the objective of universal enrollment in 3 years and the adjustment of the provisions made by the government to overcome the inter-related and never-ending education-deprivation vicious circle, are today largely questioned by experts of Non-Governmental Organizations, working daily with these “deprived” populations. If the access to education has been made a compulsory and fundamental right, the conditions need to be created today in order to make this right a reality.

These questions have been especially raised by Non Governmental Organizations working in the field with “out of school children”, with regard to one particularly marginalized population: the migrant children, who appear today not only as one of the most vulnerable, but also as one of the less visible, unrecognized and isolated populations of the country.

More than 9 million children follow their parents from one locality, district, city or state to another, leaving behind their villages, homes, lives... and schools. Migration is a complex phenomenon which requires and brings about changes, readjustment and flexibility of both people and the system in which it occurs, especially in an expanding and diverse country like

India, where so many languages, cultures, tribes, religions and realities are meeting and co-existing every day. The outcome of migration depends on the overall context in which it occurs, as also the way it is perceived and addressed by the individual migrants as well as the entire society: ranging between two extremes – on the one hand, the development of new potential and the enrichment of both individuals and society at large, and on the other hand, creating more imbalance and gaps in the social system and rendering it more fragile.

In such a context of change, brought about by the new RTE Act, as well as the readjustment of rules arising from it, a lot of grey areas seem to remain with regard to this specific migrant population. This makes it today not only important, but necessary for organizations working in this field to get a clear overview of the realities and complexities of the issues faced by these children. They therefore need to take a clear position and stand in their work in order to ensure a positive change and the access to compulsory and free education for all of them.

This is the *raison d'être* for this survey – the need for ASMAE to get a clear picture of the children's reality today, and to see what kind of projects they should support, in order to provide access to quality education to all children, taking into account their living conditions.

This survey is based on a combination of:

- interviews with experts in education from various organizations, working with out-of-school children,
- exchanges with directors, staff members (supervisors, coordinators) of Asmae's four partner NGOs working in this field,
- the experience of Asmae (through the appointed technical advisor) with these four organizations,
- interviews with out-of-school children, conducted for clinical research work, and
- existing official documentation and data on the RTE Act, migrant children and out-of-school children

This document appears as a basis of reflection for ASMAE to define its strategy and position towards education for out-of-school children in India.

Therefore after defining what we mean by "out-of-school children", we will delve deeper into the issues faced by migrant children, in order to be able to understand what the governmental policies in place are and how they address these issues. Through this analysis, we will try to highlight which are the possible interventions and roles of NGOs in this context, in order to finally identify how Asmae, as an international organization, can provide its support to them, in order to contribute towards ensuring that "free and compulsory education for all" doesn't remain only a right but becomes a reality.

WHO ARE “OUT-OF-SCHOOL” CHILDREN?

I. What does “out of school” mean?

As we previously mentioned, the official statistics estimate the rate of “out of school children” to 20% in India on the basis of the enrolment of the children in school.

But in reality this issue needs to be considered in a broader way, as “enrolment” often doesn’t mean “attendance” nor “access”, nor “literacy”: what we call out of school children is more than “children who are not admitted to school” and it is today therefore difficult to get precise and clear data on these children. We, nevertheless already understand that the number largely exceeds 13 Million.

So what exactly do we mean by “out of school children”?

- **Children who have never been to school**

These children belong to the first category of children, who never had exposure or access to any form of formal education for several reasons (see next part). Giving access to education to these children is today, one of the biggest challenges of the government: providing them the material conditions which will enable such an access, but also and above all, being able to deal with more than 60% percent of children who are and will be over-aged in their classes and who will need special support to cope up with their “delay”.

- **Children who dropped out of school**

This category of children corresponds to the children who were integrated in a formal school, and who dropped out of it: more than 54% of the children who are admitted in schools in India drop out before they complete their elementary education. If this is strongly associated with the difficult living conditions of these children, this number also highlights the tremendous dysfunction of an entire system which hasn’t been able to offer substantial conditions for the children to remain in school: lack of basic infrastructures and material in schools (Pratham Annual Status of Education Report 2010), low level of education budget allocation (Dreze & Zen, 1995), difficult accessibility to school (Tsujita, March 2009), shortage of five lakh of teachers (estimation by the HRD minister), poor and unadjusted quality of education (Tsujita, March 2009) and a high rate of discrimination against low caste children (Bhagarva, 2003) are some of the major issues that the government will have to overcome to ensure a substantial and long term integration of children in schools.

- **Children who don’t attend school**

If children are admitted to school, it unfortunately doesn't always mean that they attend school. A recent survey conducted by Pratham (NGO working in education) covering 700 000 children has assessed that in 2010 more than 30% of the children admitted to school don't attend it, which shows no progress in the past 3 years, despite of the new RTE Act. If the school registration process has been highly facilitated by the government in the past years, no measures have been taken so far to assess the attendance of the children in class and no clause of the new act is giving it a compulsory character.

If the new Right to Education Act has now become a reality and appears as a first step taken, much more needs to be followed posing a challenge involving creative and sustained efforts to reach an inclusive education system.

The challenge is all the more higher considering the situation and living conditions of the children, which we will now try to understand.

2. Who are the “out-of-school” children?

The group of “out of school children” is a heterogeneous and disparate group exposed to various socio-economical and cultural risks, and therefore also requiring different needs. Questioning who these children are, brings us naturally to the question “why are these children out of school?”, “what makes school less accessible to them than to other children?”.

The following “categorisation” of the different types of out of school children might help us to understand it better:

- **Children from remote areas: rural and tribal children**

India is one of the countries with the largest rural and tribal population, who live in sparsely populated habitations and often in remote and hardly accessible areas. The average of out of school children in rural areas remains very high, especially for girls whose school involvement is estimated at less than 56 %. If this can mainly be explained by the lack of approval by parents to send their girls to school, surveys conducted in various states of India have shown that the parents do manifest interest in sending their children to school.

Thus, only 85% of the rural habitations have primary schools within the habitation or within a distance of 1 km on an average and 22% don't have a school within a distance of 3 kms.

Moreover, 573 Scheduled tribes in different parts of the country have been registered, having their own languages which are different from those mostly spoken in the State where they live. The school programs need therefore to be adjusted not only language-wise, but also for

providing an education which is able to integrate the cultural factors of these children responding to the requirements of the governmental curriculum.

The children from rural areas are seen as particularly vulnerable due to their often very precarious living conditions. A lot of children are undernourished, face a lot of health related problems (respiratory, anemia, diarrhea) and have a poor access to basic health institutions: 20 out of 1000 children in rural areas have mental and/or physical disabilities.

Finally, it is in rural areas that the rate of working children is at its peak: according to the 1991 census, about 90% of the children, who are engaged in work are from rural areas and are engaged in agricultural activities to contribute to the maintenance of the household, due to very low family incomes.¹

- **Children engaged in labour and house hold chores**

In India the rate of working children is officially estimated to 17 Million, thus, some studies conducted in the past decade by different experts², seem to pinpoint a need to double this number if we want to come closer to the realities. According to the UN Study, about 150 Million children from 5-14 are working in various industries in India. If this considerable variation in these estimations is linked to the difficulties to identify the children, this number also highly changes according to the definition that we give to child work and child labour.

ILO/UNICEF (1997) define child labour as “work that deprives children of their childhood and their dignity, which hampers their access to education and the acquisition of skills and which is performed under deplorable conditions, harmful to their health and their development. Child work includes paid and unpaid work for the household or for the market, whether it is fulltime or part time work”. According to the ILO, “children’s work is considered essential to maintaining the economic level of household, either in the form of work for wages, for help in household enterprises or for household chores in order to free adult household members for economic activity elsewhere”.

- Child labour in the agricultural sector: according to the ILO about 80% of child labourers are employed in the agricultural sector. These children, often bonded labourers are generally sold to the rich money lenders in lieu of borrowed money that cannot be repaid.
- Children involved in various factories and industries: These children work in different textile, cotton, matchbox, carpet industries etc. They are exposed to hazardous working conditions (chemicals, unsafe environment etc) and a recent survey carried out by the

¹ 2001 Census India.

² M. Weiner, Neera Burra, Asha Bajpai, *Born Unfree: child labour, Education and the State in India*- Oxford, 2006

organisation CRY estimated the work time of these children from 12 to 21 hours per day.

- Street children: Children on the streets, either living with their families, or having escaped from their previous exploitative “employers”, work as beggars, sell flowers and other items instead of being sent to school.
- Children involved in household care: Even if the contribution to household care is often not considered as “labour”, in India, especially for young girls, this situation takes a such a proportion that the children engaged in it can’t be ignored. A recent survey highlighted that girls involved in household care often work from 16 to 20 hours a day, even if, from the outside, as well as in the family, this work is mainly not considered as “work” at all.
- Commercial sex workers: There are approximately 2 Million child commercial sex workers from the age of 5 to 15 in India. Often “sold” by their parents, these children are mainly stuck in brothels, have no access to the outside world, subjected to tremendous harassment, exploitation and extreme living conditions.

In this context, children are perceived and treated as a property of the parents, of the employers, of the society: they are ordered, threatened, silenced and, rarely have access to resources around them to protect them.

The final ideal and long term objective of the government is to eradicate child labour from the Indian picture. But unless and until then, the diversity of scenarios and realities of the child labourers are such that they require all sections of the society to work together and, in the case of education, a special provision tackling the disparity of issues these children have to face:

- Health and development problems, due to the hard and often toxic working environment, added to tremendous malnutrition
- Inexistent or poor exposure to education
- Living in extreme deprived areas in cities and rural remote areas.
- Often traumatised children: exploitation, physical as well a mental violence and abuse.
- Low household income which forces them to give support in order to fulfil the basic survival needs.
- Disorganised and often de- structured family schemes.

- **Children from deprived urban communities.**

This category of population comprises of a large number of children from the 2 previously identified groups of migrant and working children.

More then 80 Million people are considered to live under the poverty level in urban areas of India, which represent almost one third of the Indian urban population. These “deprived”

populations are mainly concentrated in “urban slums”, or “compact areas of at least 300 in population of poorly built, congested tenements in an unhygienic environment usually with inadequate infrastructure and lacking proper sanitary and drinking water facilities”.³

A research conducted among slum children in Midnapur has highlighted tremendous rates of underweight, slugging and wasting among children in slums. The children are defined as being in a high nutritional stress having a negative impact on their cognitive development and creating severe health impairments.

Moreover, according to the 2001 Census, literacy in slums is only 65%, but, despite a large number of studies on education in India, education related to children in urban slum areas has not been adequately researched and attention in education research has not been paid to the high level of disparities within the urban sector. Non Governmental Organisations working with children in these areas denounce a great amount of out of school children who, despite of having a better exposure to school (due to proximity) drop out or don't attend school, due to an unadjusted quality of education as well as high amount of discrimination and violence in schools undergone by the children. “There is no coherent perspective on tackling the problems of education of such children, and nor is there adequate information on the educational provisions reaching the average children in urban areas”. (Govinda, 2002).

This precarious situation of these “nowhere children”⁴ is all the most enhanced, as adding to the high economical issues their family and community have to face, these children are highly exposed to a lot of social problems. Studies have, for example highlighted a prevalence of alcoholism and addictions in families of urban slum areas⁵ as well as an increase of domestic violence (physical and mental) in deprived areas, including slum areas in India⁶.

More than children who are not going to school, “out of school children” appear as a particularly vulnerable group, growing up in an environment defined by extremely fragile social, family, economical, health structures, which are often not able to provide them the protection and resources they need.

- **Children from families who migrate**

Migration is an important issue in India and has become a major challenge in the contemporary scenario; Migrants appear today as one of the most vulnerable sections of society, and

³ Census of India (2001)

⁴ Chaudhari, 1997

⁵ S. Kumar, *Domestic violence and its mental health correlations in Indian women*, British Journal of Psychiatry, 2005

⁶ R. Bhargawa, BS Chavan, P. Arun, G. Pal Singh, *Prevalence of family violence*, Dept of Psychiatry, 2000)

especially children, who follow their families in an unknown territory, forced to leave their village and schools behind.

4 to 6 million children are today crossing the country going from state to state, from one construction site to the other, from one employer to the other; a surely underestimated number, due to the lack of official data and surveys conducted on this specific population. Thus migration, in itself contains a lot of disparity:

- Seasonal migration: Landless families from backward areas leave their villages to seek for work in other rural and urban areas during the “peak season”. Migration for agricultural work and/or industrial work (brick making, rice meal...) takes place generally over a time period of 2 to 8 months overlapping with the school calendar, after which they return to their village.
- Long term migration: For many impoverished families, the families may move from one site to the other throughout the country and throughout the year and become de-linked to their village. The children of these families either never enroll at school as they don't know how long they would be in a particular place: the repetitive change of environment, the hard working conditions as well as the contact with new cultural and language realities makes the integration in school of the children even more difficult.
- Nomadic populations: Certain communities, by their nature, migrate from one place to the other, like nomads or Camel Rider communities. It is, in this case not an isolated form of migration, but a community movement, which offers a basic social support but also a very protective and rigid internal system that makes the contact with the “outside world” difficult.
- Unaccompanied children: This group, probably the most vulnerable of all, consist of children who leave their homes alone to work in different sectors (e.g.: cotton fields, textile industries, construction workers) for periods of 3-4 months.

The “migrant children” as they are often called, are seen as a particularly vulnerable group and highly at risk, undergoing extreme living conditions, which we are now going to try to understand.

MIGRANT CHILDREN:

A particularly vulnerable population

The decision to migrate is, by its very nature, a complex choice, regardless of the circumstances under which it is taken, as it obliges us to revisit our entire role, situation and living conditions at any given point in time and space.

In the case of migrant families (including children) in India, this choice is even more complex, as it is driven, not by motives like pleasure and/or self-development (as is more and more the case in today's world), but by the basic need to survive, considering the conditions in which it occurs.

In order to understand the realities of this specific population better, we need to consider the different dimensions involved in this "movement" and to understand the link and interrelation between them, which we will now do by exploring the three major "steps" that these families go through.

I. The reasons for migration

In order to understand the situation of these children, it is important to understand where they come from, their living conditions and the factors that forced them to opt for migration, as a last resort. As we have seen earlier, the highest level of poverty in India is in the rural areas. This is caused in part by the lack of support from the government in the form of policies favorable to farmers, as also by the fact that agriculture, by its very nature, is prone to the unpredictable vagaries of nature. As a result, their very existence is a fight for survival, against formidable odds, like unhygienic living conditions, malnutrition, lack of drinking water, etc. Therefore, with survival on a day-to-day basis being their primary priority, education obviously takes a back seat, resulting in very low rate of enrolment and a high number of out-of-school children. Another important reason for the low enrolment is the lack of access to schools, either because they are physically far away, or because the children themselves hail from tribal communities, which creates language issues/barriers. Adding to these difficulties, is the fact that these children come from scheduled castes / scheduled tribes, and are therefore subject to various forms of discrimination. Also, with agriculture being seasonal in nature, these people tend to migrate during those times of the year when there is no agricultural activity happening.

And this seasonal migration can become permanent, due to either the hope of more work opportunities or the lure of the big cities.

Thus, for the most part, children from these families do not have access to schools. Even if they do, the forced migration causes them to drop out of school in order to follow their families, mainly because the children cannot be left unprotected, especially the girls (as shown by studies) and also they could help in the work and add to the family's income. This seasonal migration mostly overlaps the academic year, as they usually leave their village after Diwali (in Nov-Dec) and return only for the monsoons (around June) for the harvesting of crops. The academic year in India being from June to April of the next year, these children get to attend school for only about four months, after which they have to drop out. Often, they are clueless as to why they are uprooted from their village and forced to leave school and give up their education. This confusion results in them being at a disadvantage compared to other children. And this, in addition to the other factors like malnutrition, unhygienic living conditions etc, makes it more difficult for them to concentrate on studies, even if they do get the opportunity to do so. Also, the travel from one place to another itself is difficult, hazardous and distressing for the children. Thus, even at the very beginning of the migration process, the children are already at risk – emotionally, physically and socially.

2. Consequences of migration for the children

- ***The migration path: a loss of references***

As we have seen earlier, the prevalent conditions that force these families to opt for migration already put the children in an extremely vulnerable position, which makes the enrolment of the children extremely difficult and quality education becomes almost inaccessible. We are now going to see that this is reinforced by the migration path, which, being more than just a physical movement, also results in the children and their families, as individuals, losing their frame of reference. What they lose when they leave their village and to what extent this affects their access to education, is what we are going to explore now.

According to the sector of work (construction, brick kilns, sugarcane harvesting etc) that they choose, the migration can occur either within a state or from one state to another across India. The poorer states (like Orissa, Karnataka, Chhattisgarh, Bihar etc) send out the labourers while the richer states (like Maharashtra, Gujarat, etc) receive the migrant labourers. India is a multi-lingual and multi-cultural country, having 22 official languages and over 400 other languages/dialects. Also, India has a federal system in place; so while the policies (including education-related ones) are centralized, the implementation of these policies is decentralized,

and therefore can vary from state to state, district to district and sometimes even locality to locality. This causes a lot of problems, and makes access to even basic rights very difficult for these migrant families.

India has a public distribution system, wherein citizens are provided with ration cards (on the basis of their annual income), which entitle them to a certain amount of food supplies (like rice, wheat, sugar, oil etc) at very affordable prices. The migrant families, because of their movement from place to place, lose out on these affordable supplies. Although the system of temporary ration cards does exist, these families are often unaware of this. As a result, they end up having to purchase food supplies at competitive market prices, which increases their cost burden to almost double, thereby increasing the chances of malnutrition. As a lot of research has shown, malnutrition can have a highly debilitating effect on the children, not only physically but can also affect their cognitive development.

The work sites are generally in very remote areas, be it in villages or on the peripheries of the cities, resulting in very limited or no access to even basic healthcare. This again can adversely affect the cognitive development of the children. Also, these families do not have any reference points, as they are new to the place; and their employers do not really help them in this regard. And this is true of not just healthcare but the children's education as well, because access to government schools is equally difficult for these children. And the situation is worsened by the fact that most of these parents, not being educated themselves, do not perceive its importance, and therefore do not take the initiative or efforts to find a school for their children. It is generally only due to the intervention of the NGOs working on these sites that the parents become aware of schools and the need for education, due to which the children get access to education, and the opportunity to fit into the mainstream. All this is possible, of course, only if the NGOs are present on the sites where the parents are working. Especially in the case of interstate migration, the access to this information is rendered even more difficult due to the language barrier.

As we have seen earlier, the language often changes from state to state, and very often, so does the script, like Kannada/Hindi or Telugu/Marathi, for instance. Thus, all the other issues faced by these migrants in the new environment are also compounded by the language barrier and the communication gaps caused by this. This language barrier also has a detrimental impact on the schooling and education of these children. We all know that children have the ability to learn languages faster, but children who drop out of school because of migration have to start learning everything all over again in the new language. What makes this even more difficult is the fact that schools are overcrowded / understaffed and are not able to provide special / additional attention to them. Children who have never been to school earlier, if they get access to education, would not only have to adjust to the atmosphere and the rhythm of the school, but they might lag behind the others. And this could be aggravated by the added pressure of

having to learn a new language, not only in order to learn but even to be able to communicate. There tends to be a lack of sensitivity in the new school, when it comes to the language issues being faced by the migrant children. These children often end up being perceived as less capable by some of their new teachers and classmates, because while many of these children actually know a lot and are just as capable, the language barrier makes them appear to be lacking, as they are unable to communicate what they know, in this new language.

Mini Shrinivasan (a consultant on education for several NGOs) points out, "I recently met a very intelligent girl in one of the India Sponsorship Committee classes and I was just thinking that she's just been turned into an idiot, just because of this move that her parents have made. That's because, although she can do quite a lot in Kannada, now that she's faced with this new language barrier, it's almost as if she doesn't know anything anymore; she doesn't even know how to write the numbers now. These children are expected to suddenly learn a different language, and when I say different, I mean really different; Telugu and Marathi do not have even a word in common; the alphabet is different, everything is different."

This situation impacts not just the children's learning process, but also their self-confidence and the building of new relationships, both of which are integral to their overall development. And this is even more relevant in the context that this migration could be repetitive, especially in the case of seasonal workers, who return to their village after every few months, and might not come back to the same work site again.

Children whose migration becomes permanent are more likely to remain within the same state – they would be able to cope better as they would learn the language better, and also, they would be more likely to pursue their education. The situation is likely to be different in the case of the children of seasonal workers. However, very little information is available on the impact of this repetitive and ongoing process, as also the reintegration of these children into their village and their earlier schools.

In the case of both seasonal and permanent migrants, their status within the village undergoes a perceptible change. Permanent migrants and their families completely lose their bond with the village. Even seasonal migrants and their children find themselves in a "neither here nor there" kind of situation, as they are not able to be part of the decision-making process or some of the traditions and festivals. Even in school, children are not able to participate in all of the school activities; as a result, they too are unable to develop a sense of belonging.

Leaving the village, the migrant families lose the security of their joint-family system and the community at large. Also, with the lack of the support system offered by a joint family, the individual family members find their roles changing. For instance, along with going out to work, both parents now have to manage to take care of the children by themselves, whereas earlier, in the village, they had the support of other family members, neighbours etc. The major

consequences of this are borne by the children, as they see their responsibilities grow suddenly: taking care of siblings (due to the lack of crèches/pre-primary schools), helping in or sometimes even taking over household chores etc. This is especially true for girls, which has an adverse impact on their education and results in the very low rate of integration of girls in schools. So even if they do have access to schools, the amount of work and responsibilities they have at home and at the work sites, results in a huge amount of fatigue. In the process, they tend to lose out on their childhood.

It would be pertinent here to take a look at the psychological case study of an eleven-year-old boy from Chhattisgarh who had to drop out of school when his family had to migrate to Maharashtra to work at a construction site. His parents explained to us that the main reason they had brought him along was so that he could take care of his three-month-old and five-year-old siblings when his parents went to work. Despite the fact that he could attend the non-formal education classes conducted at the construction site by an NGO, he had to take his siblings along so that he could take care of them. During the classes, his siblings were constantly seeking his attention, which was affecting his ability to concentrate on his studies, despite his deep desire and best efforts to study. The psychological analysis of this boy pinpointed major learning difficulties as well as difficulties in creating bonds with his peers, despite his high level of social maturity. He had absolutely no space for himself – to play, to interact with other children or to take his own desires into account... to just be a child. And this case is just one of many such cases.

All the points that we have raised here, as also the example mentioned above, highlights that, more than just a loss of rights or a loss of references, migration can lead to a loss of identity. This physical “nowhere” is also a psychological “nowhere”, which makes it difficult for the children to be in the “now” “here”!

- ***The arrival in the new destination***

In order to get a comprehensive picture of the migrant children’s situation and living conditions, it is necessary to understand not just the place that they come from and their migration path but also the destination that they finally end up in. Although the nature of their various work sites may differ, there are some common elements. First among these is the high dependency on the employer, and the extent to which he is willing to provide his workers with various basic amenities, which is often very limited. When it comes to accommodation, each family is housed in a small temporary room, often without basic facilities like toilets, drinking water etc. Also, being on the work site itself, it is an extremely dangerous environment for the children, either because of the construction work or by being exposed to extreme climatic conditions.

With heavy workloads forcing them to work for 12-16 hours a day, these parents are unable to give their children the attention they require, which puts the children at great risk, both physically and emotionally. In addition to this, they also imbibe the stress of their parents.

In some cases, the employer lends the workers (especially for seasonal migrants working on brick kilns) a sum of money, which they are expected to pay off by working for him. They are tacitly encouraged to arrange for as much labour as possible, often including the children, who are not officially employed but end up working along with their parents in order to pay back the advance amount at the earliest. So generally, children are pressurized to work at the site, and with no provision made to take care of them (such as care centers for infants etc), this pressure is even higher and therefore there is a greater risk of falling into child labour. The builders are required by law to provide certain facilities like day-care centers (once the number of children exceeds a certain figure), which is often either not implemented at all, or done in such a way that parents don't feel secure leaving their children there. Moreover, although more and more builders and other employers, in recent years, have started allowing NGOs to take over these daycare centers (eg, in the form of NFE / support classes), there is still a lot of resistance to this alternative due to the fear of relinquishing control to the NGOs, as the NGOs would have a greater visibility into the non-compliance on the part of the builders.

The living conditions and the environment already make enrolment and access to education very difficult. This is further worsened by migration, which due to cultural, linguistic, working and socio-economic problems, and by greatly reducing the families' chances of exercising any influence on their environment, creates an even bigger gap between the child and the school.

These factors highlight the necessity for developing an approach and policies which take the multidimensional and complex situation linked to migration into account, in order to make "free and quality education" a reality for all these migrant children.

What are the various existing policies? What importance do these policies give to the specific issues faced by migrant children? How are they addressed by the government today? This is what we are now going to try to understand.

THE RESPONSE OF THE GOVERNMENT:

Which policies for the migrant children?

“Free and compulsory education for all children upto the age of 14” is the constitutional commitment of India (Article 45 of the Indian Constitution) since 1950. With the adoption of this Constitution, the stated aim was to achieve the goal of universalisation of elementary education within 10 years. Although a lot of changes/improvements have been achieved in the last 60 years (eg, literacy has grown from 16.5% to 65.38%), the process of achieving this goal is still ongoing, and remains a big challenge for the government. It is over the last few years that the major changes have been observed, particularly through the “Education for All” program (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan), and more recently, through the signing of the new Right to Education Act. Nevertheless, there is still a lot of controversy on the efficiency and sufficiency of these policies.

Before getting into the analysis, let us understand what these measures taken by the government are all about.

I. Education for All: Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Scheme

In 2002 the government introduced the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) Scheme in order to fight against the still-unstable situation of school enrolment of children in India by developing a time-bound approach. This scheme aimed to provide useful and quality education to all children in the 6-14 age group by 2010. Improving the performance of the school system and providing community-owned quality elementary education appeared as its mission in order to bridge gender and social gaps. Therefore, two major aspects of this scheme were a) the universal enrolment of children and b) the universal retention of the children in school.

- ***Universal enrolment of children:***

Considering the high number of out-of-school children and the difficulties in gaining access to them, the SSA Scheme has chosen to appeal to the NGOs to help them (SSA) in achieving this goal by providing Non-Formal Education programs. Non-Formal Education (NFE) programs were developed as a temporary alternative to formal schooling.

By offering more flexible conditions and creating a child-friendly environment as well as innovative tools, methods, rhythms and atmosphere, and, taking into account the living

circumstances of the children, these programs were more likely to be adapted to the needs of the children and to address these in an efficient way.

Awakening the interest of children for education, helping them to get used to the environment of a classroom, as well as widening the field of their opportunities through access to basic information and knowledge, would enhance their chances to enroll in the formal school system. These NFE programs appeared like bridge classes, aiming to encourage and facilitate the access to formal school. The decision to integrate NGOs into the scheme was based on their proximity and easier access to the communities, and therefore their ability to identify the out-of-school children more easily. The government supported these programs by providing for eg, teachers' salaries and training, the syllabus and daily meals for the children.

- ***Universal retention of children in school:***

Considering the high number of children dropping out of schools and the difficulties in retaining them in the formal system, the SSA Scheme aimed to improve the quality of school provisions (both human and academic), by appointing new teachers, developing and adapting training modules, improving the quality of elementary education, providing teaching material, building more schools and greatly improving school infrastructure.

Although a lot of these NGOs who collaborated with the SSA Scheme, were working on sites and in areas with migrant populations (construction sites, brick kilns, sugar factories), no provisions were made by the government to address the specific issues faced by the migrant children, to facilitate their actual mainstreaming and above all to put systems in place to avoid the constant dropouts.

As a result, the risk increased to see these supposing “temporary” bridge programs run by the NGOs being transformed in “parallel school systems”, which, instead of opening the door to formal education, were often constrained to take over the role and responsibilities which the government failed to take on.

With the arrival of the new RTE Act in April 2010, making education “free and compulsory” for all children, the financial support to these NFE programs of NGOs got abruptly interrupted, the main reason being that the children should all be sent to formal schools without any exception. This has obliged a lot of organizations to shut down their programs, when they didn't have sufficient private financial support, and other programs to very quickly readjust their strategies and ways of working with these children.

If the logic behind this sudden change of position of the government can be theoretically understood and justified, the reality of its implementation on the field is a different matter: how can we expect all the children to be enrolled in school so quickly if 60 years of planning haven't managed to do it? What about the migrant children whose living conditions often makes a long-

term mainstream almost impossible? If even the NFE programs on the working sites are shut, aren't we depriving them even more of all kinds of protective systems and reducing their chances of getting access to their rights?

If some experts believe that a transition time should have been planned with concrete strategies to make this change happen progressively and therefore efficiently, other experts believe that unless such drastic measure are taken, the situation will remain the same, and therefore perceive the current situation as positive.

In order to understand these contradictory positions better, we will now first try to understand what the RTE Act is about and to what extent it includes and addresses the issues of migrant children.

2. The RTE Act and the migrant children: A right? A hope? Or a challenge?

« We are committed to ensuring that all children, irrespective of gender and social category, have access to education. An education that enables them to acquire the skills, knowledge, values and attitude necessary to become responsible and active citizens. »

This is how the Prime Minister explained this new Right to Education Act after its ratification in April 2010, which has pronounced a crucial moment in the history of education in India and probably the entrance in a new epoch.

Nevertheless, it is important to understand that if this act has been ratified on a national level, the definition of its rules and the means of implementation will be defined and passed in each State independently from each other in a limit of 3 years, which is for most of the States still in process. This is why, the impact and the outcomes of this Act is highly dependant on the importance and investment deployed by each state.

This also partly explains the various grey areas and uncertainty in the prediction of the outcomes of this act that have been mentioned throughout by all the experts we have met.

Nevertheless the following clarification of some new major changes that are brought in these new policies will allow us to get a first idea of the current situation of education for deprived and especially migrant children in India.

The following three main objectives have been highlighted by this Act and have led to the definition of concrete measure to be taken to ensure "free and compulsory education" to all children in India:

- ***Bringing children from marginalized sections of our society into the ambit of school education***

Facilitating the access to school is one of the major objectives that emerges from this Act. Here, accessibility should be understood not only as geographical accessibility, but also as the overall facilitation and diversification of the enrollment conditions for the children. Indeed, the Act ensures that each child has access to a school within 1 km (for primary school children) and 3 kms (for upper primary school children). In cases where this is not possible, it would ensure that transportation facilities would be provided for the children.

Moreover, 25% of seats in private schools would be reserved for children from poor families, with the government arranging to pay their fees. The implementations of these two measures remains very vague and even a year after the ratification of the Act, there are very few instances of these being applied on the field, as most NGOs seem to have pointed out, and are today striving to make this a reality.

Another area that the RTE Act has majorly impacted is the registration of children in schools, in order to make schools more accessible to children. Whereas earlier, children needed their birth certificate, which a lot of children didn't have, the Act officially declares that no child will be denied admission to the school for any reason: "No child can be denied his/her school admission, regardless of age, caste, social background, religion, origin..."

If there is a lack of clarity about the need to present a leaving certificate (from the previous school), it has been clearly stipulated that: "Where a child is required to move from one school to another, either within a State or outside for any reason whatsoever, such child shall have the right to seek transfer to any other school (for completing his or her elementary education)". (RTE Act Chap II, 5.2)

There have been some discussions about the possibility of migrant being given an identification number upon entry into the school and creating a centralized data base, which would make it easier to track them across space and time, as well as to keep track of their educational history. This would also help to get a better visibility into the movements and enrolment tendencies of the migrant children, which remains a huge gap till date. However, this is a magnanimous task and would have to be taken up seriously if it is to see the light of day.

Moreover, as the school enrolment having been made age-appropriate and no longer level-appropriate, the children do not require to take any kind of examination in order to be enrolled in the schools, which means, for example that an 8-year-old child, regardless of his/her previous school background and level of knowledge, would be enrolled in Std III. Although there has been a lot of controversy about this measure, regarding its effects on the quality of

education (which we will explore later in this document), it definitely makes the enrollment process much easier and clearer.

Finally, though constitutional provisions have been made to protect languages and facilitate primary schooling, especially for tribal children, in their mother-tongue, the use of state languages in formal schooling is still predominant. The severe learning disadvantages faced by inter-state migrant children remain unaddressed in the Act; nor does the Act mention any measures that allow them to get specific support to cope up with the language barrier.

Overall, although “Specific provisions for disadvantaged groups such as child laborers, migrant children, children with special needs, or those at a disadvantage due to social, cultural, economical, geographical, linguistic, gender or such other factors” has been ensured, as Ashok Agrawal (an advocate by profession and educational activist) highlights, “it is still not clear how the government is going to provide the education to the children of migrant laborers”.

The question of the combined and shared responsibility of the government, the parents, but also the employers of the migrant laborers towards the mainstreaming process of the children, remains unaddressed in the Act and appears especially important to raise in this context.

Ms Paranjpe (director of Door Step School, Pune) raises a pertinent question: How will the universal enrolment of children be achievable if the parents are not obliged by law to mainstream their children? Unless an NGO is working on the site or the employer shows a particular interest in the conditions of its laborers, which is rarely the case, the parents seldom take the initiative to search for a school and even if they do, in the case of inter-state migration, the access to school-related information and possibilities is strongly affected by the language and “cultural” barrier.

In the case of migrant children, it is therefore still not clear in the Act whether the children are expected to go to school or if the school has to reach the children: the need to increase the visibility on the movements of these children over time and space, the development of clear strategies to reach these populations and to identify the different work sites, the compulsion of involvement of the employers in the process as well as a close work of awareness with the parents appear in this context as a must.

All this highly depends on the will and involvement of the education commissioners and managers in the different States, who, as 2 experts mentioned “are themselves not mainstreaming their own children in governmental schools and therefore don’t have the notion of the realities that these children grow up in.”

Nevertheless, as Mini Shrinivasan explained to us, with a new and younger generation of education commissioners as well as with the decentralization of the schemes, there is more flexibility today and therefore locally relevant issues are taken into account. She gives us the example of one project concerning the situation of seasonal migrant children, launched by an NGO in a district of Maharashtra and taken over by the government:

This project has developed a system of “home-hostels” in villages, allowing the children to remain in their village and in school, while their parents migrate to other parts of the country. In the villages, families or single individuals were identified who would accept to host the children in their homes and to take care of them until the parents returned: salary, house extension, food provisions are supported by the government. This project has had extremely positive outcomes, allowing children to remain in school, to live in a familiar and un-institutional environment, protecting them from the dangerous and destructuring working site realities, and, finally, it also appeared as a relief for their parents to know that their children were in a protected place.

While these kind of projects do open up the hope of real change in the field of education in India, the government should ensure that these projects don't remain exceptions, but that they evolve as generalized measures and provisions made for the till-date “out-of-school” children.

- ***To ensure that all schools and their teachers meet certain specified norms***

This objective refers above all to the material and human resources and means deployed in the school in order to offer an environment favorable to apprenticeship of the children. Offering such an environment means first of all to put appropriate infrastructure in place as well as paying attention to health, water, sanitation and hygiene issues. Therefore, the government has committed that, within 3 years, every school will create a child-friendly environment, providing among others, nutrition (1 meal per child), drinking water, separated toilets, as also clean and hygienic classrooms, providing enough space for the children.

Moreover, a child-friendly environment depends heavily on the human resources that it offers. In order to fight against the problem of overcrowded classes, the Act has established a teacher/child rate of 1 teacher for 40 children and 2 teachers for 60 children. Nevertheless, if we consider the current situation linked to the Census, we understand that the establishment of such a rate is still not enough; half of the teachers of each school have been given the responsibility to conduct the census and as a result, a lot of children remain without a class during this period. This shows us that, first of all, education is still not a priority...and there is a need to insist on the attendance, punctuality and commitment of the teachers, rather than merely having this on paper.

It is also through capacity building of the teachers that the Act aims to achieve this objective. Importance has been given to the required capacity level of the teachers as well as on the provision of trainings for them. As Ms Paranjpe (director of Door Step School Pune) points it out, there is till date a real problem in the methods and means deployed to build the capacity of the teachers, which has had tremendous impact in the results of the children. It has for example been the case after a rapid implementation of a new alphabet teaching method.

If the contents, methods and tools which will be developed to capacitate the staff of the school remain very vague in the Act, one recent pilot project developed in Maharashtra beginning of February 2011, gives us hope on this concern. Mini Shrinivasan explains us that this pilot training (that she attended and followed), uses innovative participative methods of trainings and, for the first time focuses less on the transmission of academic methods or contents but aims to address an attitudinal change (in regard of children, discrimination...), to create awareness on various issues faced by the children as well as building the motivation of the teachers. This new and very innovative training device, in case of success, might be expanded all over India.

As we previously mentioned, one of the new resources brought by this act is the system of "support classes" for the children who lag behind due to a previous poor or non existing school background. If this measure is new and appears as very relevant to ensure the mainstream and retention of the children in schools, its implementation is questioned a lot for different reasons. First of all, these support classes are supposed to be conducted by the teachers before or after their regular classes. Considering the workload of the teachers and their already full schedule in the school, the feasibility of them being able to conduct the support classes is questionable. Moreover, the concern is also linked to a basic question: Is it realistic to expect a child who has never been to school, to come up to pair with other school children within 6 months? This would require the development of a special methodology. The same holds true for migrant children, who have to learn the new language. Unfortunately, the Act does not address these issues.

Finally, a very important measure has been developed: making it compulsory for every school to form a school management committee, which would establish a school development plan and monitor the utilization of government grants and the whole school environment. This committee would be comprised of 75% parents (of which 50% have to be women), the local authorities and the teachers. This provision marks a huge step forward in the empowerment and participation of parents, and in creating bridges of communication between the government, the school body and the community, provided of course, it is actually put in place, which, till date, has generally not been the case. Nevertheless, here again, it is not possible for migrant parents to participate in these committees, as they are constantly on the move and therefore spend a very short time in any given place.

To conclude, very interesting steps have been taken through this Act, but the implementation often lacks realism and efficiency which are causes for concern.

- ***To ensure that all children receive schooling of reasonable quality, free from any form of discrimination.***

Two main dimensions very closely linked to each other emerge from this objective. First of all, the fact to offer a quality education, which refers mainly to the development of a adapted pedagogy, facilitating the learning process, stimulating them emotionally, socially and cognitively, as well as awakening their interest and curiosity.

Secondly, this objective refers to the necessity to offer the same opportunities to all children, regardless of gender, origin, social, cultural and economic background, caste and religion. It is clear that one dimension cannot exist without the other: If we intend to provide the same opportunities to all the children, we need to adapt the teaching contents, methodologies and tools to their specific needs. And in order to do that, we need to address their differences and specificities and integrate them while shaping these contents, methodologies and tools. This aspect appears to be one of the major lacks in the RTE Act. There are no clear measures and directions defined, that would lead to the shaping of quality and non-discriminative education. As most experts mention, the books, methods and tools used in the classes are mainly created, keeping in mind an urban middle-class population, not taking into consideration the living realities of the rural and underprivileged children.

Moreover, the issues linked to socio-economic differences and the caste system are totally ignored (and almost appear as a taboo) instead of being addressed and explained to the children, so that they can understand the concepts and rise above them. But all this also entails the huge job of sensitization awareness building among the teachers.

As the testimonies of these children and various professionals working with these children, as well as a lot of research and studies, have shown, there are a lot of pre-conceived notions in the minds of teachers from governmental schools about the un-educability of underprivileged children. The study made by "Save the children – India" has even reported that "a section of teachers believe that poor learning levels of disadvantage children are not because of ineffective learning processes but due to hereditary reasons, and children of migrant families are mentally incapacitated to achieve much from schooling."

Due to this regular discrimination, children feel hesitant and start developing skipping attitudes and low self-esteem. This phenomenon appears as a contradiction to the will of the Act to create a non-stressful environment for the children.

Nevertheless, these last few points explain to us, the government's decision to do away with all examinations, and to make the schools and teachers responsible for the evaluation of the students. Moreover, none of the children can fail till the completion of Std VIII. This point has raised a lot of controversy because this system has no way of measuring either the children's knowledge levels or the teachers' caliber or performance. Therefore the efficiency of this system itself cannot be measured.

This is extremely important to question, considering the fact that about 40% of children in India do not achieve minimum levels of learning after completing 5 years in government schools.

As Mini Shrinivasan points out, the RTE Act has, above all, opened up to a change of attitude and position towards education of children in India:

“People have started thinking that this is the children's right, and if they have not been in school, they are being deprived of the right. It is a very big change in the way people have to think about it. It is a very big change in the way you think about it. Now it has become the government's problem so this makes a big difference at the level of education manager because now they are answerable when there are children out of school: they are answerable.”

Nevertheless, this analysis of the new RTE Act, the changes it has brought, and the actual situation of the underprivileged children, especially the migrant children highlights that the future of education in India still remains very unclear and unstable and completely depends on the actual implementation that will be done of this Act in the coming 3 years.

The situation of the migrant children appears as particularly vulnerable and left unaddressed at different levels.

In this situation, we understand that the role and intervention of NGOs, even if not supported by the government is determinant and necessary to take the RTE Act ahead on the path to progress. Let us now see what the NGOs can do and what can their position and role be in this changing context.

THE ROLE OF THE NGOs

SUPPORT? SUBSTITUTE? SUPERVISE? OR CONTROL?

With the arrival of the new RTE Act, the subsidies provided by the government for the NGOs conducting Non-Formal Education (NFE) classes have been abruptly discontinued, putting the NGOs not only in a situation of uncertainty regarding the survival of their programs but also forcing them to revise their interventions and readjust their programs to the new rules.

The position and role attributed to the NGOs by the government is today still very fuzzy, preventing them from knowing whether a concrete task or role would be given to them by the government or if their interventions and implications will continue on a case-to-case basis. Moreover, the implementation of the RTE Act varies from one state to the other. In Maharashtra, for instance, the changes have occurred in a drastic way whereas in Tamil Nadu, very few impacts and changes have been noted by the NGOs till date.

Therefore, and considering the needs and improvements that remain to be achieved by the government-defined “right to free and compulsory education for all children” (and that we have attempted to highlight above in this document), the NGOs are today struggling to define a clear position and strategy to figure out what is the best way to fill in these gaps, reach out and provide education to all children in India.

Our experience with various NGOs and meetings with experts, have highlighted three major possible positions that could be taken by the NGOs, impacting the kind of programs and projects that they could develop, which we are now going to explore.

I. NGOs – A substitute to the government

The first positioning is based on the assessment of the gaps in the new RTE Act, especially regarding children whose needs have not been sufficiently considered, and for whom concrete measures and provisions have not been made, as in the case of migrant children, for instance. This makes the access still difficult and almost impossible for some children today.

Therefore, some NGOs working with these particularly deprived children, have the point of view that until real changes occur (which according to them would still take time) and the government reaches out to provide quality education to these children, these NGOs want to

guarantee that at least a basic level of education and rights should be guaranteed and made available to these children. They therefore, in this respect, appear to act as a substitute to the government, which is not able to assume this responsibility towards these children. These NGOs generally work with the most marginalized children (such as migrants, child laborers and mentally or physically challenged children) and on the basis of the earlier NFE classes, generally conduct support/bridge classes for these children.

The main objective of these classes is, in most cases, to provide access to basic information that would allow the children, in their everyday life, to make an impact on their environment, despite their living conditions. Therefore these NGOs develop an entire curriculum that is adapted to the realities of these children, in the sense that the rhythm of the classes, the tools and contents transmitted are shaped according to the constraints they are subjected to by their environment. Some NGOs have sometimes also developed or readjusted the syllabus in order to enable the children to gain knowledge even within short periods of time. For instance, a syllabus designed to teach children how to read and write within 90 days, has been developed by Door Step School, who mostly works with migrant children at construction sites.

This is one example among numerous programs having developed innovative and creative means to reach out to these children, which therefore almost appear as “specialized education programs” for marginalized populations.

Moreover, the RTE Act makes no mention of pre-primary schooling, although researches and studies have shown that children who go to pre-primary schools or balwadis have a higher probability of mainstreaming and retention in schools.

This can be explained not only by the fact that through pre-primary schooling, children get used to the school environment, but also that parents become more aware of the importance, convenience and impact of it on the children, which logically motivates them to continue with the process. A study done with migrant children has even shown that children, who had attended balwadis or NFE classes on the work sites, were more likely to be enrolled into school upon their return to their villages.

Therefore, the development of balwadis in remote areas is one option that could be taken over by the NGOs (which is already the case) until (and if) the RTE Act takes this step over.

These “substitute” programs are sometimes perceived as “risky” for three reasons:

One, the children might get used to the more positive, child-friendly environment, providing personalized attention at the NFE classes, which they would not find once they enroll in a formal school system which, as we have seen, does not provide such conditions, due to all the gaps that we have discussed earlier.

Two, such programs could lead to the creation of a “parallel” school system which, if adapted to the realities of the children, could at the same time, lead to a further marginalization of the migrant children because they would be perceived and treated as a separate category, instead

of being integrated with other children on the same level of equality, not only in the school but also in the overall social system.

Three, “taking over” some of the responsibilities of the government, can slow down and remove the pressure felt by the government to achieve the goals fixed by the RTE Act.

If these programs, as we saw, are able to build awareness, take the present and still very deprived situation of a large part of India’s children into account and provide an alternative option to the RTE Act, it appears important to make these programs temporary for the children and to perceive them as bridges aiming at mainstreaming the children into the government system.

2. NGOs – A support to the government

This position perceives and uses the RTE Act as a reference point and guiding principle. Using it as a reference point doesn’t mean that they do not perceive the gaps or challenges therein. But they try to find ways to make the measures and provisions a reality: the RTE Act is accepted, recognized and used as a tool of development and appears as a foundation on which the edifice of education would be built. The highest level of this edifice would be reached once access, retention, quality and equality would be actually provided.

This position allows NGOs to straddle both worlds: they are aware of the ground realities of the children while at the same time working with the policy makers. And therefore, by contributing to the development of the measures and provisions made by the government, they are in a position to ensure that the realities, conditions and needs of the children are addressed, and have more visibility into what is happening at both levels. Also, it is a way to verify that the government is assuming its responsibilities.

For instance, addressing the gaps linked to the migration issues; programs creating bridges at various levels for these children could be one example:

- ***Creating bridges from “no school” to school***

This could consist of, first of all, helping the government to identify the groups of out-of-school children by conducting surveys or through proximity work with the communities, as the NGOs often do. This would help the local governments to get more visibility into the out-of-school children and of the reasons (remote areas, child labor, migration etc) which prevents them from getting access to school. Through this process, the establishment of measures and provisions giving access to school to these children could be facilitated and above all adapted to

the realities of the children as much as possible. The previously mentioned example of the “home-hostel” system suggested by an NGO and further supported by the local authorities points out the success of this type of strategies: identifying, analyzing and suggesting pilot projects to the authorities can create such bridges and therefore facilitate children’s access to schools.

Moreover, it is also the creation of bridges from the “out to in” school for the children that can be supported by the NGOs: the development of “support classes” in collaboration with the school or independently (after-school program) in order to prepare the children for the school environment and guide them through the progressive adaptation appears as a must to fight the high rate of childrendropout. This could be addressed, for example, through the development of methods, tools and activities stimulating the concentration and attention skills of the children, or by revising the contents learned in school in a more joyful and creative way, in order to awaken the interest of the children and also, at the same time, to strengthen their self-confidence.

The NGOs could therefore also play an important role in the implementation of the “special classes” which should exist in each school. As mentioned in the previous sections, these “special classes” aim to help the “over-aged” children who dropped out of school, to cope up with the “required level” within a few months, which requires the development of a concrete and specialized methodology. Working on the global monitoring of these “special classes”, the development of an adapted methodology as well as the capacity building of the teachers who will be in charge of these, could be an option of support for the NGOs. For example, the 90-day syllabus teaching children how to read and write, developed by DSS (mentioned in the previous chapter) could be integrated in these support classes. Through such a process, the access, retention and quality of education would be greatly supported by the NGOs.

- ***Creating bridges between one environment and another, from one language to another***

The RTE Act remains very vague in the measures and provisions made to address the specific issues faced by the migrant children. If this can be seen as a lack, it can also be perceived as an opportunity to develop new strategies and projects addressing these different issues in order to facilitate their access to schools: a role that the NGOs could probably undertake.

The language problem, as we previously saw, can highly impact the children’s motivation and self-confidence levels as well as their overall learning process, even when the children were previously enrolled in schools. Developing pilot bridge classes in schools having a large number of migrant children, to introduce them to the new language with a specialized methodology, or, by providing capacitated teachers or educators (who, for example, when most migrant children

come from the same state, speak the language of that state) could be another example of a project which an NGO could submit to the government. Such projects could also incorporate activities helping the children to mentally rebuild a link between their villages and their new environment, which as we saw is difficult and sometimes even harmful for these children: activities where the children could speak about their migration experience, retracing and identifying their path in space and time through games, drawing activities etc.

Moreover, the creation of a “welcoming cell or meetings” project in the schools for parents and children, giving them basic information about the school system as well as on the new environment (references to health care centers, to organizations providing support/tuition classes) could allow a proximity work with the parents, building a trustful relation with the school staff which could also lead to a higher level of commitment in the education of their children, as well as helping them to find references and to get access to their basic rights.

- ***Creating bridges between children, communities, schools and government***

Finally, the NGOs, by their “neutral position”, could, as mentioned by most experts, play a very important role in the implementation of the School Management Committees (SMC), which are not in place in most schools a year after the ratification of the RTE Act. Some pilot projects have already been designed by some NGOs to support the schools in the monitoring of these SMCs: establishment of the SMC, development of a yearly plan, definition of the role and responsibilities of each member, verification that the established norms are respected, helping them to define the needs, working with the managers of the schools on the follow up of these SMCs, providing them some training facilities on specific issues as discrimination, addressing special needs of the children for example which could be further transmitted to the teachers. These could be some of the measures that the NGOs support, in order to empower the first steps which could further lead to an efficient and sustainable role of these SMCs.

It is also through sensitization programs that these bridges between the children, families, schools and governments can be built. As we mentioned earlier, no compulsion has been given to the parents to send their children to school. But it is also a great lack of awareness that appears as a central issue, as the parents most of the time, don't know about the new Act making school not only an opportunity, but a RIGHT for their children! Sensitization programs with the parents and the communities on the different measures ensured by the Act appear therefore as determining to make its implementation come true. It is only by making parents fight and demand for the rights of their children and by “giving them the courage to demand and to make them understand that this is your right, it is not a favor that you are asking for” (M. Shrinivasan) that the act can become consistent and have a sustainable impact for the children in India.

But it is also by working with the children, making them actively participate and building their awareness of the right to education, that the access to and quality education can be achieved. Audrey Ferrera, gives us two examples that illustrates the importance of such programs:

“Today our children are doing it, they have become agents of change. For example, when teachers were beating up kids, the children themselves got to the headmasters office and took up the issue (...) Today children have come here (office of the NGO) and reported a child marriage. We have asked them to ring up the organization and to bring up the police on their own without identifying themselves because they are frightened to, do that. So they did it, and they got the child’s marriage postpone. So children take a stand, they take it up. Participation is one of the major vectors of change.”

The problem linked to the reality and the future of the children needs also to be questioned and could be addressed by the NGOs, as in the Act, there is no mention made about what will happen to the children after the completion of standard VIII, once the children are finished with their primary education.

Indeed, the completion of standard VIII doesn’t lead to any working opportunity, unless it is followed by further studies, which in most cases these families can’t afford to provide to their children. Some experts explain that this can appear as the reverse side of education and can even worsen the situation of some families: we cannot ignore the realities and needs of these children and families, and therefore need to provide means to ensure that education will also lead to some earning possibility. Different alternatives should be offered to these children (but also to children more generally), for example through the provision of vocational trainings, part time apprenticeships, and guidance in the “after school” world. Such programs could also motivate the parents in the mainstream process of the children, as education would not only be an “abstract” right for them anymore, but would lead to some concrete solutions and possibilities, which these specific populations need. Suggesting and empowering this kind of initiatives could be one of the roles taken over by NGOs.

- ***Creating “mental bridges”***

Finally, it is also by providing an overall support to the children outside of the schools to help them to cope with the different issues they have to face in their everyday life that the NGOs can ensure that the education of the children is provided and the risks of drop outs reduced.

Providing psychosocial support to these children for example could help them strengthening and in some cases, rebuild the emotional, social and cognitive foundations, which as we saw, largely impacts on the learning process and the day to day development of the child. For migrant children especially, such kind of interventions could help them to create links between the past and the present, the here and the there, and to help them to transform the difficult migration situation in a richness and empowering opportunity.

If all these programs could appear as extremely beneficent for the children and highly empower a long term and universal access to education, they nevertheless also depend on the will of the local authorities to support and take up these programs.

3. NGO's: a watchdog or advocacy position

This position is based on the point of view that, if the RTE Act is a positive step forward for the universalization of quality education for all children, the authorities still lack the will and don't demonstrate substantial efforts to make it come true on the fields. Therefore, empowering and constraining the authorities to take up their responsibilities by putting pressure and developing advocacy measures appears as the main guiding principle. This would allow to generating a long term change in the mentalities and in the overall situation of education in India.

The NGOs therefore appear as "watchdogs", protectors and advocates of the rights of the children at a state and/or national level.

- *The creation of networks*

Through the creation of networks, different organizations working in the field of education come together addressing the different "non accomplished" measures by the government, the different difficulties and problems remaining and try to find means which will encourage or oblige the government to stick to these issues.

The combination of the various field experiences, of the position and specific programs developed by different NGOs, allows them to have a more general overview on the situation of the children, and to have more tools in hand not only to discuss but also to illustrate the different remaining issues: it allows on one hand to widen the perception and the reflection of each organization on its own programs, and on another hand, by coming together, the NGOs also increase their power, widen the field of action and influence towards the governmental policies.

If these networks mainly try first to develop direct strategies to pressurize the government by organizing exchange meetings, developing proposal, it is generally as a second resort that they choose the implication of medias (internet, news paper, radio) or the organization of various resistance movements (strikes, sitting ins...) to ensure the fulfillment of the commitments made by the government.

These networks define different level of priorities to address the different unfulfilled measures. Some of the priorities defined by specialists are:

- The provision of transportation for children who do not have access to school

- Opening schools in areas where more than 20 children remain out of school, such as on construction sites, where the access is rarely made possible
- The establishment of the SMCs in each school and support classes which still remain non-existent in most of the schools of Maharashtra
- Ensuring that measures will be taken to develop basic quality infrastructures in each school.
- Obliging the government to provide education identity cards to each child with a number, which will highly facilitate the mainstreaming process of the children and their enrollment in other schools

If pressure should be put on the authorities, it is also through the creation of awareness of the masses that this process can be facilitated.

- ***Campaigning***

Developing campaigns addressing the different issues of marginalized children and their future in the present context of education is another option that the NGOs could focus on. Campaigning allows creating awareness and therefore to change the overall attitude, positions, visions of the masses towards a particular issue, and to make them more active and implicated in the process of society change.

In India for example, a very little proportion of the population is today aware of the new RTE Act and its importance for the future of the youth of the country: the experts emphasized on the needs of empowering the population, making them aware of the situation of the marginalized children who remain often discriminated due to the accumulation of misconceptions and the high level of segregation between the higher parts of the society and the lower parts of the society.

Campaigning can be conducted in different ways:

- o The use of Medias to communicate on the situation of the children: creating videos, information pamphlets, posters.
- o Development of sensitization programs which could be presented in different places like colleges, universities, schools but also for corporate events and other public events (festivals, concerts, cultural events)
- o Developing projects of sensitization between private schools and public school or private schools and NFE classes: a common project between the children from privileged and children from underprivileged backgrounds can help work on the different misconceptions and stereotypes that the children develop towards each other and to widen their perceptions of their own "worlds". This kind of project should nevertheless be conducted with a lot of planning and in a way that it doesn't create the opposite effects by strengthening the gaps between the children.

These are some of the many existing ways which could empower and expedite the change process for these marginalized children.

If these different positions greatly vary from one another and impact on the strategies and types of programs developed by the organizations, it doesn't mean that they are contradicting and that one same NGO can't take different positions at the same time.

This analysis of the possibilities of involvement of the NGOs in the contemporary Indian context highlights that to make a real, consistent change occur, the work on one level of difficulty without taking the other levels into account is not enough: it not only on one micro system, but at a global level that the change needs to be done, through a revision of the attitudes, values, roles and status of each member of the society and make them aware of their responsibility as citizens, as individuals, as humans.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

Possible role and position of Asmae

This study allowed us to understand that, if the role of the NGOs remains today uncertain and is still in a shaping process, there is still a long way to go to reach the universalization of quality education in India. The role of these NGOs appears therefore as extremely necessary and determinant to allow the Act to actually take action especially with marginalized populations like migrants to whom the access to basic rights is still made difficult.

As an international organization involved in the protection of rights of all children, it is in this context very important for Asmae to become aware of the different issues faced by the children and of the important role that the NGOs are still playing in this challenging and changing context.

Providing financial and/or human support to NGOs working in this field appears today as very pertinent and should, according to us definitely be taken further.

Overall, each of the previously defined positions has its own justification as it intervenes on different levels of realities: the first one allowing children whose situation has not yet been addressed by the government to get access to at least basic rights, education and a support system that facilitates their social, emotional and cognitive development as individuals.

The second one, ensuring and facilitating the implementation of the given RTE Act by building bridges and helping the government to make it become true.

The third one, addressing the responsibilities of the government and of the masses in order to enhance a change at the higher and global level of the system.

So how could Asmae support the NGOs? What are the means of intervention and kind of projects that could be supported and/or created?

I. Supporting through networks

Supporting and encouraging the creation of a network of NGOs addressing the issues linked to the RTE Act would be interesting for Asmae. If various networks already exist for child rights, till date none of them is specialized in the issues linked to the RTE Act, which, according to us needs special attention, considering the amount of time and tasks that remain to reach the challenge of universalization of Education in India. Such a network could have various objectives:

- Provide a platform of discussions, reflection and debate on the current situation of the children: thematic meetings addressing particular issues and analyzing them together.

- Collect and assemble data on the children in order to get more visibility on their socio-economical situations as well as the status of their access to education which would allow to define more clearly which are the priorities of interventions and which kind of projects should be developed to face these issues.
- Identify the main difficulties and priorities of interventions in this context
- Draft strategies and methodologies for advocacy and ensure that measures and provisions are developed by the governments as planned.

2. Supporting through funding

Till date the government hasn't planned to give any support to the NGOs who run education programs for out of school children or mainstreamed children despite the fact that as we have seen their role in the current context remains more than determinant for the implementation of the Act in the field. Therefore, Asmae's intervention through funding of programs which address the issues of the children, especially the most marginalized ones, as it is the case for migrant children, would appear as pertinent.

If the choice of the programs should be determined by the partner NGOs, we believe that in the current context, it is very important for Asmae to have a clear position and definition of the expectations and objectives of these programs and be very particular on the fact that they should not appear only as substitutes to the government, but should above all tend to facilitate the access of public schooling and public rights, by measuring the different possibilities: definition of concrete strategies, methods and means to bring the children in the mainstream system, and, when not yet possible, integrate an advocacy program to pressurize the local authorities.

Another interesting support could consist in funding pilot projects aiming at developing new innovative ways to facilitate the access for migrant children in schools, like the "home-hostel" project we previously mentioned. These pilot projects would allow developing innovative and reality adapted strategies, which of course would need a lot of previous analysis and planning to ensure their feasibility, but, in long term vision could widen the field of possibilities and actions of the government. One of these pilot projects could for example consist in designing a program for the establishment of the SMCs in the schools, or, developing a "welcoming cell" for the migrant families in the schools, to facilitate their adaptation.

Finally, it could also be interesting to fund projects which address the psychosocial development of the children, as this level is till date hardly taken into account and to our knowledge, no projects have been developed addressing the specific difficulties that the migrant children go through. As we saw these children go through various traumatic situations which make their

investment in the present realities difficult and often impact negatively on their learning and overall development process (self confidence, concentration...). Therefore, supporting a project providing psychological support to these children, like a "mobile clinic" or alternative and creative group therapy sessions would strongly help these children to build/rebuild strong psychological foundation which would make the adaptation to their new environment easier.

3. Supporting through the provision of a Technical Advisor

Finally it is also through the appointment of a new Technical Advisor that Asmae could provide a very relevant support, as in this context of new change, the NGOs need to develop a lot of new strategies and methods to be able to cope with the current situation and therefore also to build the capacities of their staff.

The direction that this support could take would of course depend on the types of programs run by the NGOs, and the needs identified by each Organization. But our analysis leads us to think that follow-up support brought by a Technical Advisor could be particularly pertinent in today's context:

- Supporting NGOs in the collection, compilation and analysis of the data that they have on the children. Most of the organizations have collected a lot of data, but the lack of time and the overwork that they have to face often doesn't allow them to make use out of it. A Technical Advisor could, for example develop a common methodology for various Organizations, in order to get a clearer and broader overview on the socio cultural, economical and education background of these children. The outcomes of this analysis would naturally have to be presented and used in a way that it would help the different programs of the Organizations to rise on different levels: adjusting their programs in a more efficient way (clearer definition of the objectives and the overall methodology), increase their impact and influence on shaping policies and decision making through the presentation of relevant and representative database on children, that they could use for advocacy and/or for sensitization.
- Developing advocacy strategies appears as another relevant option: as we saw, advocacy appears in the transition context brought by the RTE Act as an essential and necessary means of change. Therefore, a Technical Advisor could help the organizations commonly to design specific advocacy strategies and/or work on the development of a sensitization campaign.

- Support the development of specialized programs, which require the development of specific skills to address specific issues of the population. Our insistence on the “specific” character of this support, is due to the fact that we think that methodological or technical support to programs directly working on education should not be the main focus of Asmae today, as these responsibilities should be taken over by the government. Asmae’s technical support would be more relevant on programs addressing issues which could indirectly have a positive impact on education: for example, the appointment of a Technical Advisor to support the development of a psychosocial support center for migrant children, which would help the children to strengthen their self confidence, to develop better coping strategies (etc) which can positively impact on their school experience and results.

These various examples help us to understand that Asmae, through its position can highly contribute to make the edifice of education in India grow by providing new resources, encouraging the exchanges of practice, expertise and co-construction of strategies and by supporting those who appear today as the guarantors and protectors of the rights of the children.

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